



Testimony before the House Health Policy Committee  
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Good morning and thank you for inviting me to share the YMCAs response to Michigan's childhood obesity problem. I am Fran Talsma, representing the Michigan State Alliance of YMCAs where I serve as the Project Manager for Statewide Pioneering Healthier Communities. Since 2004, YMCA of the USA has supported and facilitated healthy community initiatives in 190 communities and several states in high-level local leadership coalitions facilitated by Y associations. Y-USA has served as a lead national partner with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on their healthy communities work and more recently with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The goal of the Ys efforts is to build environments rich in support of healthy eating and physical activity opportunities. In 2008, Y-USA received funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to launch a policy change initiative in six states and 32 communities over five years. The aim of this work is to address the childhood obesity epidemic through changes in the environments where we live, work, learn and play.

Michigan was one of the six states selected because we have need, and demonstrated readiness to make an impact on youth obesity. Together with the support of RWJF and CDC, Ys have facilitated healthy living initiatives in 11 Michigan communities (Adrian, Ann Arbor, Battle Creek, Calhoun County, Cadillac, Kalamazoo, Owosso, Port Huron, Saginaw, Sherman Lake and Grand Rapids). Thirty percent of Michigan's children are overweight or obese, and parents indicated obesity as a top health concern for their children in a Mott Children's hospital national poll. In March, the Michigan Department of Community Health Director Olga Dazzo stated that obesity was the number one health threat facing Michigan. Since the Y is for youth development, healthy living and social responsibility, the Y was a natural partner for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Obesity effort. In addition, the Y was selected, because we are embedded in communities across the state. From Marquette to Monroe and Port Huron to Benton Harbor, there are 70 Ys in Michigan. Although YMCAs, in large part are independently led by their executive officers and Boards of Directors, and therefore reflect the individuality of the communities they serve, the Michigan State Alliance of YMCAs works to standardize and leverage local effort across the state. Through the State Alliance, YMCAs are able to coordinate a state-level response to childhood obesity across all of Michigan.

To accomplish this, The Y is tackling Michigan's youth obesity problem on both a programmatic and community level. At the Y, we have a long history of healthy living programs, YMCA summer camps are located throughout Michigan and many of our Ys have longstanding partnerships with schools to provide physical activity enrichment during the school day and afterschool. Additionally some recent obesity reduction research suggests shifting focusing to the very young, the Ys childhood programs are well positioned to improve standards for healthy eating and physical activity in childcare settings across Michigan.

On a state level, the Michigan Alliance of YMCAs Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative joins other leading childhood obesity organizations in addressing Michigan's obesity epidemic. The Y fully supports the Healthy Kids Healthy Michigan coalition to increase physical activity standards from crib to commencement, and to promote policies, which increase the consumption of healthy (preferably Michigan grown) foods by all children.

At the simplest level, childhood obesity is caused by an energy imbalance— children consuming more calories than they expend through normal growth and physical activity. But, as you have heard in previous testimony, the root causes and strategies to address obesity are complex. Although the conversation about childhood obesity usually starts in the pediatrician's office, it is in schools, neighborhoods, and communities where life style changes must occur. To move the needle on childhood obesity, we need to **MAKE THE HEALTHY CHOICE THE OPTIMAL DEFAULT**. Too often, children and their families leave their Doctor's office with the best of intentions, but return to an environment where responsible choices are nearly impossible, the YMCA aims to change this by creating healthy communities for all Michigan residents.

Since 70% of Michigan residents live within 5 miles of a YMCA, the Y is positioned to partner with health care providers, schools, parent groups, and community-based organizations to serve as a resource for Michigan's children. In addition to geographic access, the Y, with its deep commitment to social responsibility, is financially accessible as well. An example of such a partnership is the Ann Arbor Y's joint effort with Dr. Wolford and the University of Michigan Clinical and Health Care Research, MPower Junior program, which is a weight reduction intervention for children considering bariatric surgery. The Y hosts the patient's family for nutrition education and supervised physical activity, and provides the family with a Y membership, so the lessons learned from Dr. Wolford's program can be imbedded in everyday life. I am also aware that Dr. Peterson, from Helen Devoss Children's Hospital is part of an effort for medical reimbursement to provide weight reduction education in schools and community organizations, providing children the ongoing resources necessary to overcome obesity. The Michigan state Alliance of YMCAs supports policies for improved nutrition and increased physical activity in early child learning and care centers as well as K-12. We also support Michigan's school nutrition standards.

On a national level, the Y has partnered with a private insurer (United Health Group) and the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control around diabetes prevention. We know from the nation's largest clinical trial on diabetes prevention that modest weight loss of 5-7% for people with pre diabetes can reduce incidence of the diabetes by 58%. Ys were able to translate this program and replicate the outcome on the ground in communities—for a fraction of the cost (@\$300-\$350 a person). The YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program helps those at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles in order to reduce their chances of developing the disease. In a classroom setting, a trained lifestyle coach helps participants change their lifestyle by learning about healthy eating, physical activity and other behavior changes over the course of 16 one-hour sessions.

YMCAs are now being reimbursed by insurance companies, including United Health Care with performance-based metrics that provide for a higher reimbursement when the desired weight loss is achieved. The Y is working with CDC to expand the program nationally through Ys and other community-based providers. The Y's goal in developing this public-private-non-profit partnership is to spread an innovative behavior change model that helps reduce the burden of chronic disease in communities across the nation.

In my work as the project manager for the Michigan Statewide Pioneering Healthier Communities effort, I travel throughout the Country collaborating with youth obesity leaders from several states. I am proud to be from Michigan. The work underway in our State around this issue is often cited as trend setting. Our local and State health departments, along with many non-profits and coalitions like Healthy Kids Healthy Michigan have laid the necessary groundwork to reduce childhood obesity in our State.

Although strategies to reverse Michigan's childhood obesity epidemic are multi faceted, with our deep roots in the healthy living movement, and our coordinated state level obesity reduction effort, the YMCA is ready and able to partner across Michigan to improve the health of our children. Thank you and I welcome questions.